

Penn and Liberty Avenues (Commercial Buildings)
(Lipson Building)
636 Penn Avenue
Pittsburgh
Allegheny County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5152-F

HABS
PA
2-PITBU
48-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
MID-ATLANTIC REGION NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

HABS
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48-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
PENN AND LIBERTY AVENUES (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS)
(Lipson Building)

HABS No. PA - 5152F

Location: 636 Penn Avenue
Pittsburgh, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania

Quadrangle Name: Pittsburgh West/Pittsburgh East
Quadrangle Scale: 1:24,000

UTM References:

- a. Zone: 17 Easting: 584700 Northing: 4477110
- b. Zone: 17 Easting: 584690 Northing: 4477170
- c. Zone: 17 Easting: 584830 Northing: 4477220
- d. Zone: 17 Easting: 584860 Northing: 4477140

Present Owner: Penn Liberty Holding Company

Present Occupant: Vacant

Present Use: Vacant

Significance:

The Lipson Company Building was significant for its contribution to the overall commercial character of the Penn-Liberty district throughout the twentieth century. Erected in 1905, by owner and real estate developer S.M. Willock, the Lipson Company Building served as a mercantile store and warehouse typical of the burgeoning fashionable downtown. Of all its tenants, the one who maintained the longest association with the property was the Jos. Lipson Co., woolens and fabrics, who occupied the premises for half a century.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1905

Pittsburgh Bureau of Building Inspection, Yearly Docket of Building Permits, Volume 22, 29 April 1905.

2. Architect: unknown

3. Original and subsequent owners:

References to the chain of title to the land upon which the structure stands are in the Office of the Recorder of Deeds, Allegheny County Courthouse Annex, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

1882 Deed, September 28, 1882, recorded in Volume 458,
pages 268 - 70.
Herman H. Hofman and wife to Eliza C. Seip.

1887 Eliza C. Seip died intestate.

1903 Orphans Court, No. 183 March Term 1903, Christian P. Seip, husband, and four children appointed heirs.

1903 Deed, March 21, 1903, recorded in Volume 1285,
pages 296 - 99.
Christian P. Seip, et al, to R.H.M. MacKenzie.

1904 Deed, June 24, 1904, recorded in Volume 1340,
pages 403 -05.
R.H.M. Mackenzie and Alice, his wife, to George G. Barrett.

1904 Deed, October 31, 1904, recorded in Volume 1359,
page 155- 56.
George B. Barrett and Martha M., his wife, to S.M Willock and Linda H., his wife.

1906 Deed, May 11, 1906, recorded in Volume 1477,
pages 33 -35.
S.M. Willock and Linda H., his wife, to Ludwig Kaufman.

- 1933 Deed, July 15, 1933, recorded in Volume 2516,
page 563.
Sheriff Sale against Ludwig Kaufman to Fidelity
Philadelphia Trust Co.
- 1936 Deed, December 31, 1936, recorded in Volume 2496,
pages 80 - 81.
Fidelity Philadelphia Trust Co. to Fidelity Philadelphia
Trust Co., Trustee.
- 1943 Deed, April 12, 1943, recorded in Volume 2758,
pages 399 - 400.
Fidelity Philadelphia Trust Co. to Charles M. Morris.
- 1982 Deed, October 29, 1982, recorded in Volume 6555,
pages 31 - 34.
Charles M. Morris to Penn Liberty Holding Co.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: H. L. Kreusler

Henry Lawrence Kreusler, contractor and builder, entered the carpenter's trade at age twelve, and worked for thirteen years before starting his own firm in 1886. Kreusler's contracting business grew steadily, enabling him to expand his operations; in 1900 he organized and served as president of the Thomas Coult's company for the handling of stone and concrete contracts. In keeping with the trend towards iron and steel construction in the twentieth century, Kreusler also organized and acted as president of the Lawrence Steel Construction Company in 1903. Presumably, he used steel from this company in the building he constructed at 636 Penn Avenue for S.M. Willock in 1905. Kreusler also erected the First Presbyterian Church at Uniontown; the Best, Fox and Company Building, 25th Street and A.V.R.R.; the Buch Building, Fourth Avenue; the J.W.G. Smith Building, Liberty Avenue; and numerous residences.

5. Original plans and construction:

The original building was a six-story warehouse that occupied its entire 20' by 60' foot site. It was constructed of a steel skeleton with brick walls that backed up a terra cotta facade

along Penn Avenue. The interior consisted of clear span open loft spaces, with an elevator and stair located midway along the west wall. The building was erected at an estimated cost of \$20,000.

6. Alterations and additions:

The Lipson Company Building underwent major and minor alterations throughout its lifetime; among these were window replacements, and changes to the first floor shop front and interior spaces to accommodate the commercial tenants.

For further information on the Penn-Liberty area, see

LOYAL ORDER OF MOOSE BUILDING (Moose Hall)	HABS No. PA-5149
WALLACE AND MCALLISTER BUILDINGS	HABS No. PA-5150
KINGSBACHER'S	HABS No. PA-5151
PENN AND LIBERTY AVENUES (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS)	HABS No. PA-5152
PENN AND LIBERTY AVENUES (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS) (McCormick Building)	HABS No. PA-5152-A
PENN AND LIBERTY AVENUES (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS) (King Building)	HABS No. PA-5152-B
PENN AND LIBERTY AVENUES (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS) (Whitten Building)	HABS No. PA-5152-C
PENN AND LIBERTY AVENUES (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS) (Arbuthnot Building)	HABS No. PA-5152-D
PENN AND LIBERTY AVENUES (COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS) (Harper Building)	HABS No. PA-5152-E

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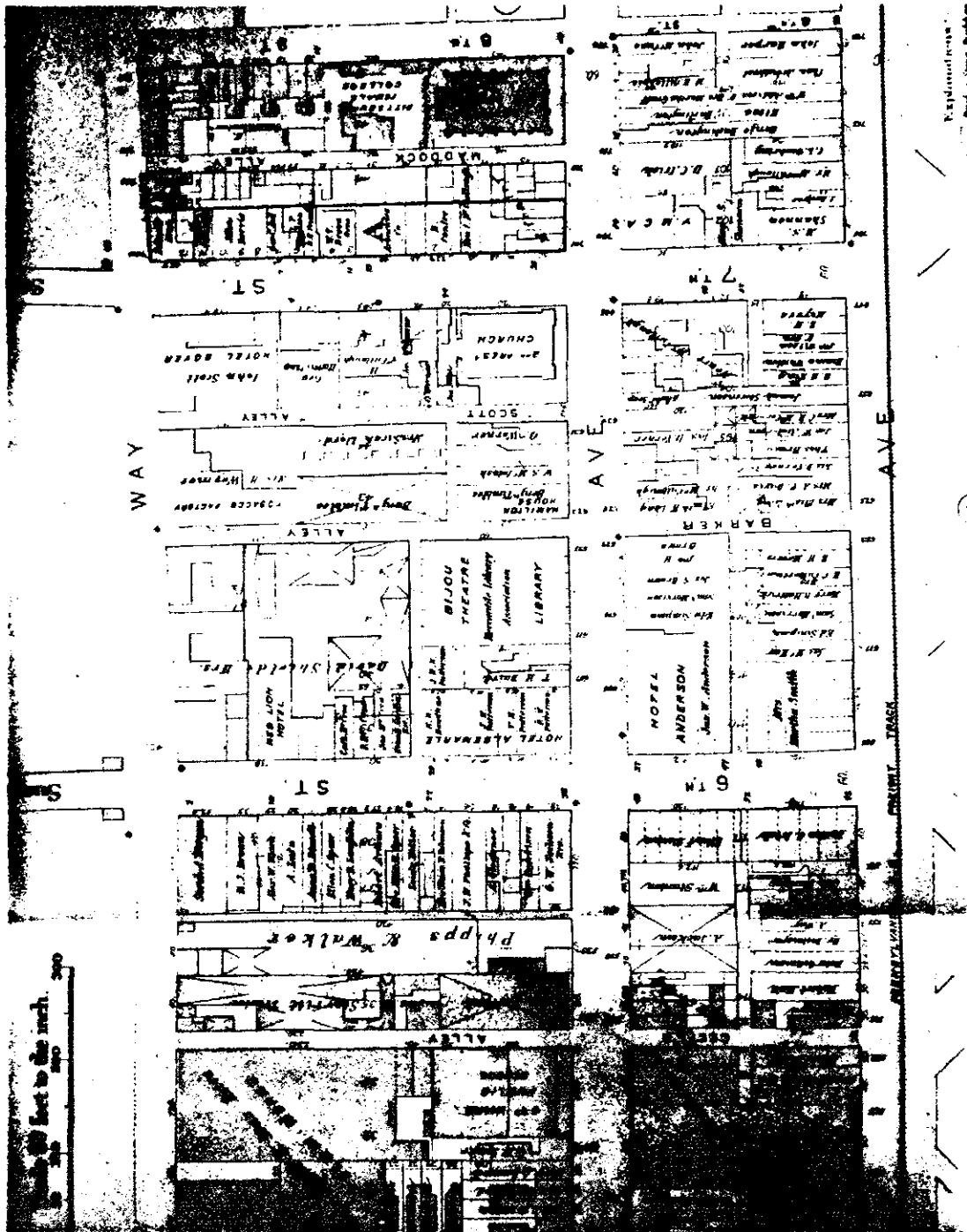


Fig. 1. Penn/Liberty area in 1889, from: G.M. Hopkins, Atlas of the City of Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, 1889, Vol. 1, plate 5.

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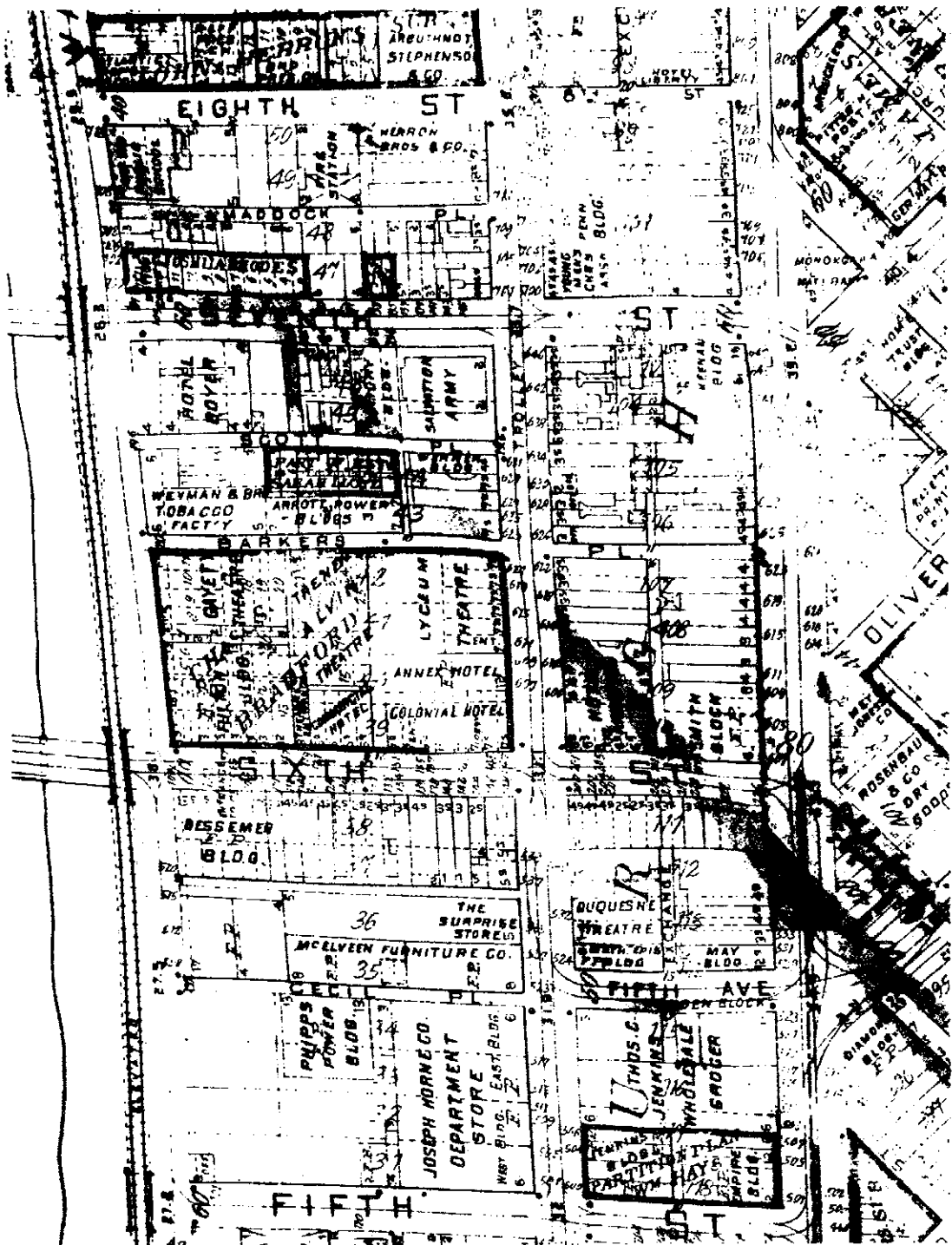


Fig. 2. Penn/Liberty area in 1910, from: G.M. Hopkins, Map of Greater Pittsburgh, PA, Philadelphia, 1910, plate 1.

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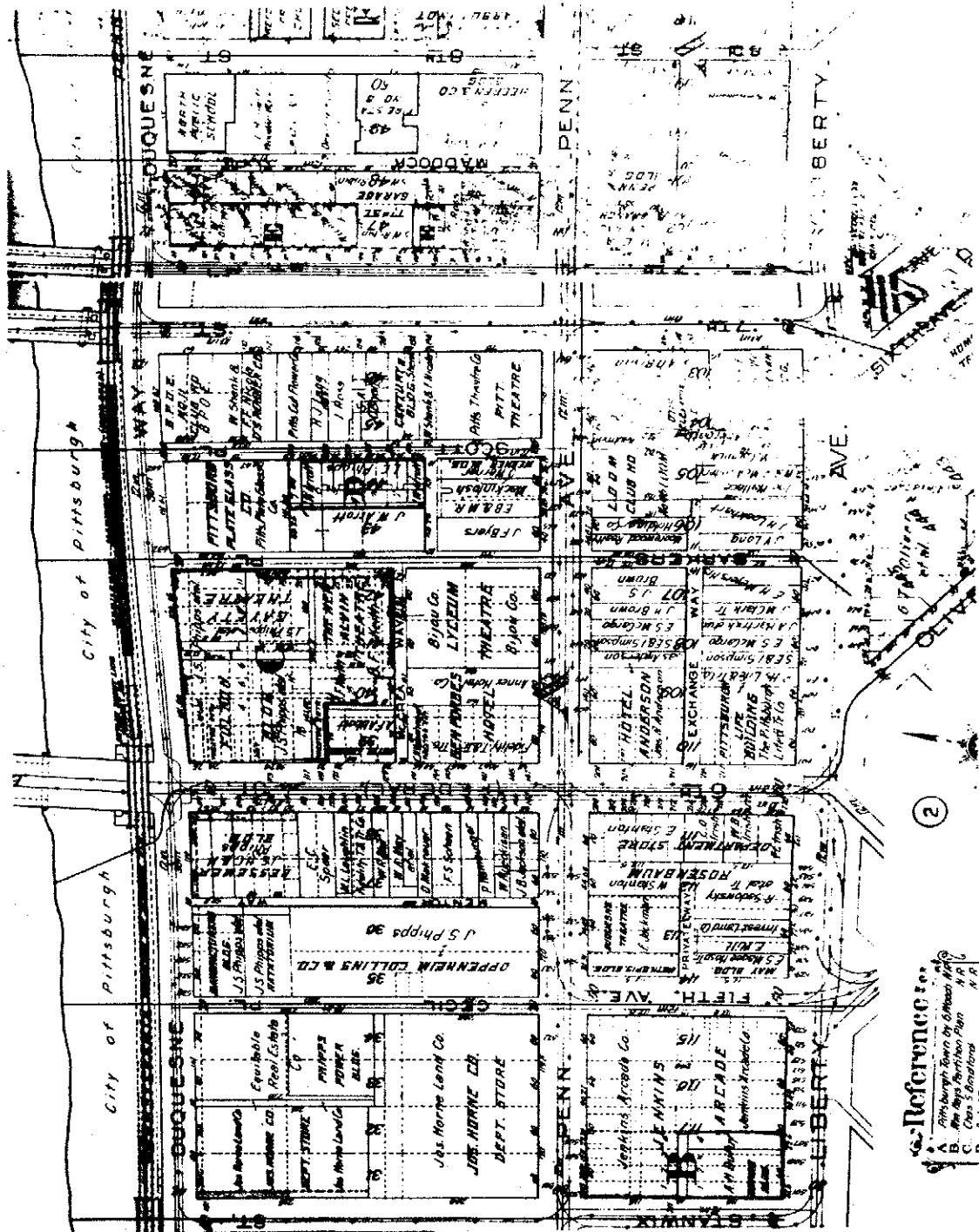


Fig. 3. Penn/Liberty area in 1923, from: G.M.Hopkins, Real Estate Plat Book of the City of Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, 1923, Vol.1, plate 4.

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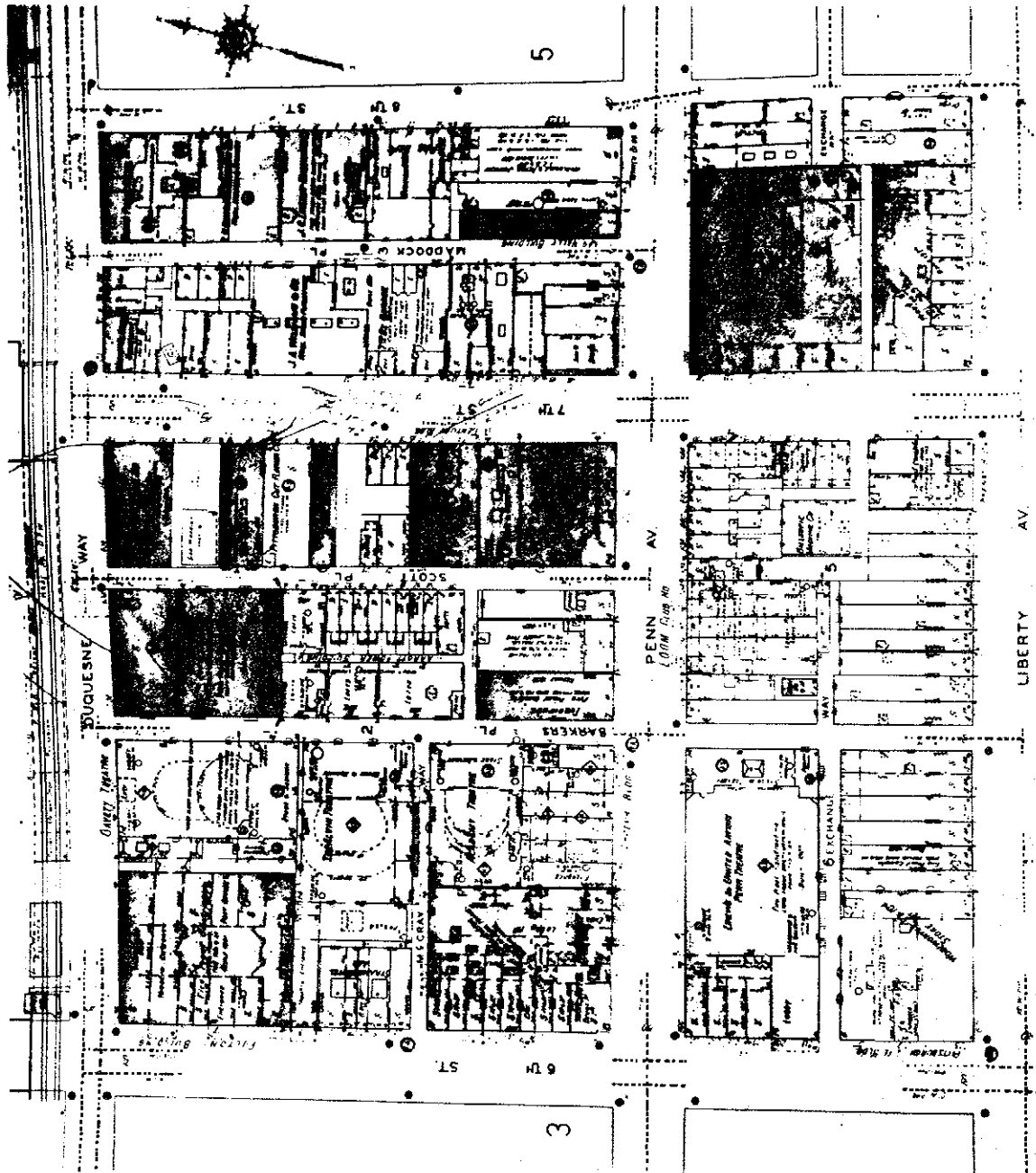


Fig. 4. Penn/Liberty area in 1927, from: Sanborn Map Company,
Insurance Maps of Pittsburgh, New York, 1927, Vol. 1, plate 4.

B. Historical Context:

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, produce commission houses fronted by shed porches and delivery wagons, dominated the streetscape of Penn-Liberty, between Sixth and Eleventh streets. The freight lines of the Pennsylvania Railroad ran along Liberty Avenue from 1851 through the 1880s, making the area a logical location for Old World-style street markets. A passenger railway operated along Penn Avenue as early as 1859, but comfortable and convenient passenger transportation into the district was not fully realized until the early 1890s when the Liberty Avenue freight line was replaced by street car lines. In part, this development set the stage for the area's commercial, civic and cultural renaissance of the next two decades. A second important factor was the construction of new mercantile warehouses such as the Harper Building and commitment of wholesale and retail dry goods merchants, such as Joseph Horne, The Rosenbaum Company, and Arbuthnot-Stevenson, all of whom operated their stores in the neighborhood throughout the 1870s and '80s, to remain and build more commodious and luxurious quarters in the 1890s and early twentieth century. With the apparent success of the downtown shopping center, hotels, theaters and clubs soon burgeoned, creating a distinct urban role for the Penn-Liberty area. However, in the 1950s and '60s redevelopment efforts and an increased focus towards areas outside the downtown contributed to the erosion of this commercial and entertainment core.

The mercantile building at 636 Penn Avenue was part of the early twentieth century transformation of Penn-Liberty. Throughout the building's history, the floors were leased rather than occupied by the owners. In 1930 these tenants were: Smith's Fur Shop, The Grodin Co., tailors trimmings, Addressing Equipment Co., and J. McKain and Son, hat cleaners. After the second owner, Ludwig Kaufman, lost the warehouse in a sheriff's sale in 1933, Jos. Lipson Co., woollens and fabrics, rented the premises from the Fidelity Philadelphia Trust Co. and remained there until 1984. The Grodin Co. and J. McKain & Son, retail apparel trades, also remained at least until the 1940s.

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LOYAL ORDER OF MOOSE BUILDING, PITTSBURGH, PA.

U. J. L. PROPLES, ARCHITECT

MILLER CONSTRUCTION COMPANY, BUILDERS

Entirely of cream matt glazed Atlantic Terra Cotta. The impervious surface of glazed Atlantic Terra Cotta prevents the absorption of coal dust that may settle on its surface. Soap and water will clean it thoroughly.

Fig. 5. Edge of 636 Penn Avenue on Left, Showing Original Pivot Sash.
 from: Yearbook of the Pittsburgh Architectural Club, Vol. 11, 1917, n.p.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character:

The six-story loft building at 636 Penn Avenue displayed elements of free-classical architecture that became a popular stylistic vocabulary in the early decades of the twentieth century. Terra cotta end piers rose the entire height of the building, framing a wide bay of windows. The first and second floors, set off from the upper floors, formed a base. Here, piers featured raised lozenges, derived from French Renaissance architecture, and a dentilled cornice anchored by lions' heads topped the two floors. Colonettes attached to the end piers marked the third through fifth floor "shaft", which was also topped by a cornice, and the sixth floor "capital". The original broad pivot sash windows were replaced by similarly scaled casement lights divided by mullions at the second floor, and narrow, three-part multi-sash casement windows at the upper floors. Small light luxor transoms have been replaced at all but the fourth and fifth floors. Below the roof line, an arcade of small arches sprang from the row of spaced lions' heads.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions:

The building at 636 Penn Avenue occupied 100 percent of its 20' by 60' site, extending from Penn Avenue and backing up to the rear of 637 Liberty Avenue. Interior dimensions were taken as 18' 11" by 58' 3". The six stories rose to a height of approximately 88 feet.

2. Foundations: unknown

3. Walls:

Partywalls and the rear wall were of common bond brick. The Sanborn Atlas lists diminishing wall thicknesses of 20, 20, 16, 16, 12, and 12 inches.

4. Structural system, framing:

The warehouse had a modern steel skeleton of girders and columns. Wood joists that spanned the 18' 11" of the interior were spaced at regular intervals, presumably 12" on center, allowing the clear span open loft spaces.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors:

Because the first floor had been boarded over, the door configuration is unknown.

b. Windows and shutters:

Original windows were broad pivot sash, two of which spanned the entire bay of the Penn Avenue facade. These windows were altered significantly by the insertion of mullions that changed their proportions: second floor windows consisted of four panels of double sash lights while upper floors were divided into two sets of triple multi-pane casement windows. Single-paneled transoms replaced the original luxor transoms at all but the fourth and fifth floors. The east wall, which was sparsely fenestrated, had segmental one over one double hung windows. The fact that it was fenestrated helps to prove the frame, rather than load bearing masonry construction for the side walls.

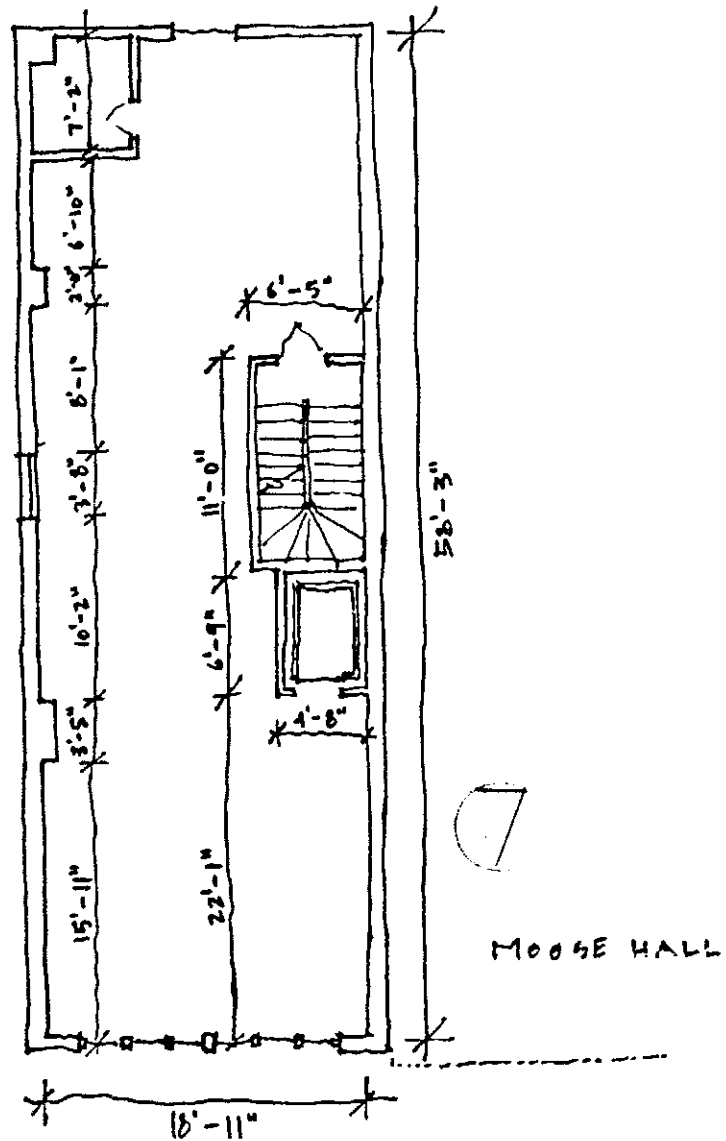
6. Roof:

a. Shape, covering:

The roof of 636 Penn Avenue sloped back from the Penn Avenue facade slightly and was composed of built-up roofing.

b. Cornice, eaves:

The terra cotta cornice featured arches springing from a row of lion's heads.



636 PENN AVE.
 (JOS. LIPSON CO. - FABRICS)

Fig. 6. Sketch Plan of First Floor, 636 Penn Avenue by John Bertola and Philip Snyder, of Kingsland, Bauer, Havekotte, Pittsburgh, PA.

C. Description of Interior:

The interior displayed open clear span spaces typical of Pittsburgh loft buildings. A stair and elevator, both located at their original positions midway along the west wall, provided access to the upper stories.

D. Site:

The building at 636 Penn Avenue, which faced roughly north, occupied 100 percent of its 20 by 60 foot urban site, abutting Moose Hall to the west, the rear of 637 Liberty Avenue to the south, and a parking lot (previously a gable-roofed building) to the east.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Early Views:

Yearbook of the Pittsburgh Architectural Club, Vol. II, 1917.

B. Interviews:

Carolyn Boyce, Preservationist for Pittsburgh City Planning Department. Interview with George E. Thomas. Discussion of planning issues and proposed historic district.
18 December 1984.

Richard Palucci, Mellon-Stewart Contractors. Interview with George E. Thomas. Discussion of demolition, with photographs of buildings as basis for commentary. Mr. Palucci was the supervisor and prime contractor on the job. 9 January 1985.

Frank Crown, head of Crown Demolition which handled the actual wrecking of the buildings. Telephone interview with George E. Thomas. 9 January 1985.

John Bertola and Philip Snyder, interns from Kingsland, Bauer, and Hsvekotte, Architects. Interview with George E. Thomas about demolition of buildings and discussion of sketch plans.
9 January 1985.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Pennsylvania Historic Resource Survey Form, Office of Historic Preservation, PA Historical and Museum Commission, Harrisburg, PA.

Pittsburgh Bureau of Building Inspection, Building Permit Files, Public Safety Building, Pittsburgh, PA.

Pittsburgh Bureau of Building Inspection. Record Book of Alterations and Repairs, 1897-1914. Archives of Industrial Society, Hillman Library, University of Pittsburgh.

Pittsburgh Bureau of Building Inspection. Record Book of New Additions, 1896-1916. Archives of Industrial Society, Hillman Library, University of Pittsburgh.

Pittsburgh Bureau of Building Inspection. Yearly Docket of Building Permits, 1877-1916. Archives of Industrial Society, Hillman Library, University of Pittsburgh.

Recorder of Deeds, Allegheny Courthouse Annex, Pittsburgh, PA.

2. Secondary and published sources:

The Book of Prominent Pennsylvanians. Pittsburgh: Leader Publishing Co., 1913.

Greater Pittsburgh Directory of Directories 1906, Pittsburgh: A.A. Rutis, 1905.

Hopkins, G.M. Atlas of the City of Pittsburgh. Philadelphia, 1889. Vol.1, plate 5.

Hopkins, G.M. Map of Greater Pittsburgh PA. Philadelphia, 1910. plate 1.

Hopkins Co., G.M. Real Estate Plat Book of the City of Pittsburgh. Philadelphia, 1923. Vol. 1, plate 4.

Palmer's Pictorial Pittsburgh and Prominent Pittsburghers.
Pittsburgh: R.M. Palmer, 1905.

Pittsburgh of To-day. Compiled by the Consolidated Illustrating
Co., Pittsburgh, 1896.

R.L. Polk's Pittsburgh and Allegheny Directory.

R.L. Polk and R.L. Dudley's Pittsburgh, Allegheny and Allegheny
County Business Directory.

Sanborn Map Company. Insurance Maps of Pittsburgh. New York, 1927.
Vol. 1, plate 4.

D. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

University of Pittsburgh, Photo Archives

Prepared by: Carol A. Benenson, M.S., and George E. Thomas, Ph.D.
Clio Group, Inc.
15 February 1985

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Allegheny International project is a continuation of the downtown redevelopment of Pittsburgh's Golden Triangle. Spurred by the success of the Heinz Hall complex, and motivated by the availability of the Stanley Theater, the Allegheny Conference for Community Development commissioned Llewelyn-Davis/Hanna-Olin to prepare the Penn/Liberty Urban Design Study which was completed in late 1979. The consultants found the region to be underutilized, and proposed three focii -- a performing arts center, a convention center, and the riverfront. Though buildings were often of high architectural character, changes in shopfronts had degraded the street level. Moreover, it was clear that as the effects of removing heavy industry from the river edge of the downtown continued to occur, the support zones that had developed to serve them in Penn/Liberty would become increasingly derelict. On the other hand, just as transportation had reshaped the region in the 1850s, it could be

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anticipated that the new subway would have a similar impact in the 1980s. The 600 and 700 blocks were found to have buildings of modest architectural interest -- with the exception of the Moose Hall, Kingsbacher's, and 631 - 633 Liberty, and recommendations were made that argued for the removal of many of those buildings to emphasize the area as a cultural center. It was assumed that in the end, while the Heinz Hall, Stanley Theater, and perhaps the Moose would stay, that the other buildings would be replaced by a larger office block fronting on Liberty Avenue.

Three years after the Llewelyn-Davis/Hanna-Olin study, newspaper stories reported the acquisition of property in the 600 block of Liberty and Penn avenues, by the operators of Heinz Hall, and in November of 1983 the Post Gazette reported that the Penn/Liberty project had been unveiled (19 November 1983). With Allegheny International as the prime mover two office towers would be erected, and the Stanley Theater would be restored. Land acquisition proceeded from 1980 until 1984, with the new owner being the Penn Liberty Holding Company or its subsidiaries.

In 1983 it became clear that the new project probably would cause the demolition of the Moose Hall while some concerns were expressed about the demolition of the adjacent shop buildings as well (Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, "Triangle Landmark May Affect Tower Plan" 30 November 1983). The Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation dropped its opposition to the Moose Hall demolition in December of 1983 and on February 10, 1984, Louise Ferguson, Executive Director of the Foundation, announced their reasons. "Allegheny International would not go ahead with the Moose Building (in place on Penn Avenue)." The Post Gazette had already argued editorially "No Place for Moose" (5 December 1983), "What is clear is that the city stands to gain greatly from the construction of the new headquarters for Allegheny International, which will be a center for cultural as well as corporate activity. The Moose Hall should not be allowed to block that farsighted endeavor."

The final solution was a memorandum of agreement between the National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior, and the Pittsburgh Trust for Cultural Resources (Penn Liberty Holding Company), the Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation, and the Pittsburgh Historic Review Commission to record the streetscape elevation of 631 - 641 and 719 - 725 Liberty Avenue, the Moose Hall, and 636 Penn Avenue, and to provide individual elevations of 631 - 633, 637 Liberty and the elevation and plans of the Moose Hall. Sponsored by the Heinz Endowment, the drawings were produced under the direction of John Hnedak, Office of Cultural Programs, Mid-Atlantic Region, National Park Service, by Kingsland, Bauer, Havekotte, architects of Pittsburgh, PA, in the summer of 1984. Supervising architect was Roger L. Kingsland, and the

buildings were measured and drafted by Philip J. Snyder and John A. Bertola. At that time, the buildings were also surveyed, and sketch plans and data on them were gathered. In the autumn of 1984, George E. Thomas, Ph.D. and Carol A. Benenson, M.S., of the Clio Group, Historic Consultants, surveyed the standing buildings, developed the research and historic background and prepared the written documentation. During this later phase of the project, Rebecca Trumball of the Office of Cultural Programs, National Park Service, assumed direction of the Penn-Liberty report.